DRAWING ROOM

Drawing in Social Space
UNBUILD: a site of possibility

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Introduction

Mary Doyle and Kate Macfarlane

Drawing Room opened its first, permanent home after twenty years of nomadic activity with two exhibitions. The first celebrates and documents *Drawing in Social Space* and the second, *UNBUILD*, takes drawing, our new building and our community as sites of possibility. Drawing is for everyone and we want Drawing Room to be for everyone. A certain amount of unbuilding is required to enable this to happen. As Drawing Room celebrates the inauguration of its new home, we acknowledge our privileged position – a reminder that the built environment is a physical manifestation of the inequities of our society.

Operating without premises for an extended period of time provided an opportunity to shift our focus outwards. *Drawing in Social Space*, initiated by Kelly Chorpening and curated with Misty Ingham and Renee Odjidja, explored drawing beyond the gallery walls. The selected participants constituted a broad range of disciplines, interests, ages, ethnicities and nationalities, including students from Camberwell College of Arts, neighbouring community partners and artists from outside of the United Kingdom, such as the Bolivian activist collective Mujeres Creando, Amsterdam-based Russian artist Gluklya and Ghanaian artist Al Hassan Issah. An additional project extended the partnership to the University of Nevada, Reno, working with Moroccan artist AZ OOR.

Our learning team have always placed children, their families and teachers at the centre of our activity. Working with artists, they introduce drawing as an important route to experimentation rather than to virtuosity.

This encourages children to see drawing as a process rather than a product; as an activity that stimulates the imagination and encourages dreaming; and as a site of pleasure, transformation and possibility.

Artists interested in the built environment and its impact on our bodies, minds, memories and dreams were invited to be part of the discourse that has informed *UNBUILD: a site of possibility*. Jessie Brennan's project is the product of conversations and gardening sessions with our neighbours, which prompted important questions for Drawing Room. Ian Kiaer's site-specific work incorporates found elements – materials that come with their own material registers of use – to propose sympathetic ways of occupying space. Emily Speed's new commission erases the distinction between body and building to draw attention to the built environment as a manifestation of systems of power. Tanoa Sasraku shares her first 'Terratype', a large-scale, thickened drawing that embodies a period of loneliness and isolation. Do Ho Suh's new drawings are made in collaboration with architectural modelling software and robotics, a process and outcome that grapples with the artist's experience of cultural displacement.

Drawing Room's *raison d'être* is to explore what drawing is, what it might be and what it can perform or do. Our vision is an institution in flux, always questioning, challenging, resisting closure and stasis. *UNBUILD: a site of possibility* announces this intention. The exhibition begins the building's transformation from a set of inanimate materials, geometries and measurements into a space formed through live interactions, 'always in the process of being made'.[1]

1. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London and Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005), p.9. A radical geographer, feminist, theorist and political activist, Massey developed a body of work around space, place and power. In *For Space* she proposed a 'relational' approach, elaborating on three propositions: that space is 'constituted through interactions', 'the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity' and 'always in the process of being made'.

Drawing in Social Space: testing a model outside the gallery

Kelly Chorpening, in close dialogue with Renee Odjidja and Misty Ingham

Background

The idea for *Drawing in Social Space* arose from the experience of co-editing *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing*, which was published by Wiley-Blackwell in early 2021.[1] In the book's survey of global practices, a category of drawing emerged that saw artists using the medium in more public and collaborative ways. This type of work typically exploited the characteristics of drawing as an accessible, affordable and portable means of expression. Through the creation of large-scale posters and murals and small print run newspapers and zines, artists were making powerful statements that impacted a wide range of communities. The design of *Drawing in Social Space* was also informed by the flourishing of remote communication that was a by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic. It showed us meaningful connections could be made without the need to fly people or artworks around the globe, thus making it possible to develop a dynamic project that was both green and financially viable.

In its final form, *Drawing in Social Space* encompassed four, artist-led projects that placed emphasis on collective, iterative processes, leading to shared authorship. 'Drawing' was reimagined as a tool for thinking, discovery, storytelling and communication. 'Social Space' referred to the ways projects were held outside traditional exhibition spaces, and where participants included a broad range of disciplines, interests, ages, ethnicities and nationalities. From remote locations, artists offered inspiration by sharing their work and ideas, but handed the making over to project participants.

Drawing Room was the ideal collaborator for this project, not only for its long-held commitment to contemporary drawing, robust learning programming and network of community collaborators, but also because they were without premises while their new Bermondsey location was under construction. Our mutual aim was to sustain drawing activities outside the gallery, by testing a model that put engagement at the centre of how work was made and experienced.

Drawing in Social Space, project 1, May 2022.
(Photograph Esme Wedderburn).

Drawing in Social Space, project 1: Mujeres Creando, May 2022.
(Photograph Esme Wedderburn).

Project 1: Mujeres Creando
2 May – 6 June 2022

Mujeres Creando is a Bolivian women's collective that uses satire to problematise ways in which women's bodies are sexualised within patriarchal, Catholic society in South America. Cartoons, slogans and installations help create a space for productive debate. How might Londoners relate to their approach, especially in light of an upsurge in violence against women in the United Kingdom since the pandemic?[2]

A film presented by Danitza Luna, a member of Mujeres Creando, offered an overview of the collective's history, aims and struggles, with an unflinching account of conditions for women, girls and LGBTQ+ people in Bolivia. This became a powerful starting point for Camberwell College of Arts students to work with Young Girlz Matter, a self-formed collective of female school students aged between twelve and seventeen from South Bank University Academy. Over a period of six weeks, the groups spent time connecting and exploring what it means to be part of a collective, reflecting upon the processes of Mujeres Creando through a combination of drawing, visits to the university, walks, games and the sharing of food. Activities ultimately led to the display of large-scale drawings near the girls' school in South East London, and the creation of a zine.

Drawing in Social Space, project 2: Gluklya, *The Room of Unpredictable Drawings,* PACT, March 2023. (Photograph Esme Wedderburn).

Project 2: Gluklya (Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya)
1 November 2022–29 March 2023

Gluklya is a Netherlands-based artist who uses her work to speak truth to power, whether in defiance of Vladimir Putin's rule in her native Russia or concerning the plight of refugees throughout Europe. She sees an alignment between the artist's tool and the worker's tool. Under capitalism, 'unproductive time' – activities that involve exploring, listening and drawing – become small but important acts of resistance.

Fine Art students from Camberwell College of Arts and the Southwark-based Citizens UK community-support project Parents and Communities Together (PACT) became enmeshed in a series of encounters and interactions, using mapping and storytelling to connect with each other. Students spent time in groups, working across disciplines to uncover stories and to map South London, creating a series of layered and conversational works. They developed further ideas through workshop proposals, which were delivered at PACT sessions, in order to expand approaches to storytelling and collaboration. Gluklya, parents, children, students and staff created an immersive space of drawings, marking their presence and time through gestures, improvised actions and the creation of a zine.

Drawing in Social Space, project 3: Al Hassan Issah, workshop with The Blue Youth Club, April 2023.

Project 3: Al Hassan Issah
1–30 April 2023

Al Hassan Issah is a Ghanaian artist who explores the prevalence of gates in his country to comment on societal divisions, material histories, theatricality and objecthood. His drawings explore this vernacular and pose questions about the legacy of colonialism in Africa. With an existing track record of working with young people, could children in London take inspiration and explore their personal identity through a gate design of their own?

Fine Art students from Camberwell College of Arts and children from The Blue Youth Club in Bermondsey were engaged in an intense period of exploration. The youth centre became an active studio where children made sketches and rubbings alongside Al Hassan on Zoom, as he worked in his studio in Kumasi. He posed the question: 'Is it the materials that lead you to the city, or the city that leads you to the materials?' With this, they embarked on an exploration of Bermondsey, including Drawing Room's new site, using the entrance gate as a focus to draw, discuss, document and question.

Through drawings and collages, new gate designs were produced and displayed locally: on fences, doors and walls, and in shops, markets and bus stops. Simultaneously, Al Hassan placed printed copies of the young people's work on notice boards and walls in Kumasi, exploring the idea of public art, both locally and internationally. The group also produced a zine.

Drawing in Social Space, project 4: AZ OOR, sketchbook page of Betta Manolo, an MA Geography student at the University of Nevada, Reno, 2023. (Photograph Bobby Lee).

Project 4: AZ OOR (Noureddine Ezarraf)
3 April–31 July 2023

The fourth project extended the partnership to the University of Nevada, Reno, working with the Moroccan artist AZ OOR (Noureddine Ezarraf), testing the design of Drawing in Social Space outside an urban context.

The arid climates of Marrakech and northern Nevada enabled participants to specifically explore the use of mapping to manage access to water. AZ OOR posed questions to the group, such as: what is a line? What does it mean to draw from above? He cited a concept developed by Moroccan sociologist Paul Pascon, which explored the difference between 'water from the sky vs. water from the state'. AZ OOR's aim was to raise awareness regarding maps as a means of controlling and organising the world.[3]

Working together, a group of students and lecturers of Art, Graphic Design and Geography from the University of Nevada, Reno, used a variety of methods to collect, record and measure information. Activities revealed complexities connected to conservation and reparation when it comes to the consequences of mapping. As with the previous projects, the participants also created a zine.

Installation view of *Drawing in Social Space* at Drawing Room, London, 2023. (Photograph Benjamin Deakin).

Reflection

To work collectively, one must first understand that each project comes with its own unique set of variables and challenges. Working across generations, disciplines, institutions and organisations means working with people from diverse backgrounds, who are coming into contact with each other often for the first time. A huge amount of care is required to address varying degrees of confidence, vulnerabilities and social hierarchies, in order to approach something together. Producing four *Drawing in Social Space* projects made this clear: there's no single roadmap or methodology that applies to all.

When we began work on the first project led by Mujeres Creando, the time spent establishing legal agreements and defining duty of care responsibilities far outweighed the time spent on the project itself. We were managing the criteria for the funding that we had received alongside the art students' curricular demands and outside commitments, as well as the organisational priorities of Drawing Room and South Bank University Academy. We were also preparing to work with minors, in the context of a project that introduced challenging material and involved activities outside the school grounds and hours. We truly were forging new ways of working.

So, why go to such lengths? There's a lot to understand about the different ways collective engagement through drawing can function as a knowledge practice – a practice through which participants find a voice, process information and even evoke change. Contemporary theories help situate both the conditions and their transformative social value.

In 'Curatorial Research as the Practice of Commoning', Je Yun Moon explores emerging forms of curatorial research that instigate 'a particular network of relationships […] formed and continuously run by providing the ground for meeting points'. This mode of work imagines the product of activities as something expansive and open-ended: 'the knowledge that contemporary artistic research produces is able to open up a new reality that can be actualized by a collective reimagining of the world.'[3]

In their 2016 book *Drawing Difference: Connections between Gender and Drawing,* authors Marsha Meskimmon and Phil Sawdon, proposed a feminist framework for contemporary drawing:

> Moving beyond binary thinking towards the simultaneity of object and process, exploring concepts of becoming, emergence and materialisation, emphasising the embodied and experiential and formation of subjectivity in connection with others – these preoccupations are central to the critical explorations of contemporary fine art drawing and feminist theories and practices within and beyond art.[4]

In more general terms, artist Imani Jacqueline Brown examines a world in which statistics and satellite imagery present a tidy version of events, but seem to exacerbate indifference to human suffering. She argues for the value of 'sensory awareness of the position of one's human self' – a strong case for on-the-ground investment in individuals and their stories.[5]

All these theories recognise the value that collective enquiry has in productively activating communities. This was also the aim of *Drawing in Social Space*: to develop an artist-led approach that resisted the usual hierarchies, to see what new techniques and connections could be gained.

The skills required to work on this project are difficult to teach to art students in an education system that centres on individual statements and has a population that is relatively homogenous when it comes to age and socio-economic background. The students have benefited tremendously from interactions with the artists, curators, parents, children and each other. We have also observed the ways in which participants – sometimes very young and often new to contemporary art – have engaged with the artists' work in sophisticated ways. On this, it's important to note how the design of each project allowed for the direction of activities to shift according to the influence of processes of making, walking and talking on the progress of ideas. Projects have evolved through reciprocal exchange and this is why, in the exhibition, the artists' work is intertwined with work made by participants. This demonstrates how the collective ethos of the project has yielded new discoveries and insights for everyone.

In theory, the value of this sort of project might be recognised, but the reality is that the stakes for the different constituents, such as galleries, educational institutions, community groups and artists, ends up being very different. This becomes especially evident when it comes to sharing the outcomes. The results challenge how the project is valued overall as an artistic endeavour.

Display

At the conclusion of *Drawing in Social Space*, we must contend with the fact that many outcomes have been ephemeral and some work has even been lost. It might be tempting to put a sign on the door saying 'you had to be there'. The truth is: there's an inverse relationship between the inclusive nature and sheer energy of these projects, and the experience of viewing what remains. The audience is left with documentary film, photography, a few drawings and descriptive text: small clues that allude to the activities that enlivened each project. It's impossible to fully capture the experiences of spontaneous, quality exchange between the artists, students, parents and children. Like the four projects, we see it as a springboard for further dialogue and exchange.

Work made throughout *Drawing in Social Space* aligns with broader characteristics of socially engaged art, in that it hasn't been created with an exhibition in mind. Here it's interesting to note that Kayan, a young person from The Blue Youth Club deliberately used the word 'display' instead of the unfamiliar word 'exhibition'. This distinction can also be applied to projects that consider formal qualities secondary to processes that yield new understandings and connections across a diverse range of collaborators. That's not to say that outcomes aren't worthy of display. Seeing how collaborators have responded to these artists' ideas is, by varying degrees joyful, beautiful, moving and humbling, but the work tends to be less about 'finish' and more about 'being in the moment'. In other words, the work can't be measured by aesthetics alone.

Installation view of *Drawing in Social Space* at Drawing Room, London, 2023. (Photograph Benjamin Deakin).

That said, there are some wonderful similarities between *Drawing in Social Space* and the concurrent show at Drawing Room, *UNBUILD: a site of possibility*, particularly in the way both exhibitions linger on ideas of proposal. Yet, there are also stark differences. In *UNBUILD* we encounter a vast, light space with ample room to situate work created by five artists. *Drawing in Social Space* encompasses four artist-led projects with dozens of collaborators, within the restrictions of a much smaller and less appealing space, with additional displays outside. This adjacency creates a contrast that surely impacts the perceived value of the two shows. This is an enduring dilemma of socially engaged art.

This isn't to criticise the curatorial vision of Drawing Room per se. After all, it has been a leader in community engagement and learning programmes. This is more to propose a new model for the art world at large. As the Helicon Collaborative noted in their 2017 report 'Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Practice', 'critics and funders alike often use fine art criteria and language to assess the quality and value of socially engaged work, even though it has different aesthetic origins, values and intentions.'[6] Although the intention with *Drawing in Social Space* was to bring engagement activities to the centre, the fear is that, within the gallery, the perception of the project – given the assigned differences in quantity and quality of space – is that it remains at the periphery.

What alternatives should we be exploring? How can we be more effective in creating sustainable and collaborative artistic communities, where funding and infrastructure is more supportive and agile? There must be better ways of enabling artists, educational institutions, galleries, museums and their surrounding communities to work together with more ease. What else can we learn from projects such as *Drawing in Social Space*, in terms of their critical importance, and how we create and experience art in the future?

Here it might help to bring in the voice of a *Drawing in Social Space* artist. In recent conversations with Al Hassan Issah, including a public event at Drawing Room, we discussed the value of collaboration.[7] He described how he works within a network that encompasses many other networks – an environment that derives in part from his communal upbringing, as well as from the fact that artists in Ghana operate without any government-funded infrastructure. He has united with other artists in a commitment to elevate an entire community, through the exchange of skills and processes needed to make work and by regularly interacting with young people. In this system, art is transformed from a commodity to something closer to a gift. It's a reciprocal and rhizomatic approach, in which artists are actively rooted in their communities, collectively engage in their struggles, invent generative ways of working and contribute to the building of communal success. It would be refreshing to see more exhibitions – or displays – that show how the individual artist learns and grows alongside collaborators, through collective, creative processes.

Members of The Blue Youth Club in front of their work on the gate to Drawing Room, with Al Hassan Issah, Renee Odjidja and Misty Ingham, September 2023. (Photograph Fiona Russell).

Banners greet visitors to Drawing Room's new premises. They show rubbings made in Bermondsey by The Blue Youth Club, having taken inspiration from Al Hassan's work. In a nearby window a large drawing is shown. Although vertical, it has clearly been made horizontally with drawings oriented from all sides. It evokes a social, creative moment, when Fine Art students discussed Gluklya's ideas and reflected upon their explorations of Peckham. This work and these displays successfully capture a kind of ecosystem, showing the reciprocal dynamics that *Drawing in Social Space* has created.

Drawing in Social Space was conceived by Kelly Chorpening, previously Programme Director, Fine Art at Camberwell College of Arts, and now Professor and Chair of Art at University of Nevada, Reno. It was developed with Renee Odjidja, Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Camberwell College of Arts, UAL, and Misty Ingham, Projects and Partnerships Curator at Drawing Room.

Thank you to all our partners: Drawing Room; artists Mujeres Creando, Gluklya, Al Hassan Issah and AZ OOR; PACT; The Blue Youth Club, Bermondsey; Young Girlz Matter, South Bank University Academy; Yamuna Ravindran, Drawing Room Librarian; the Fine Art students at Camberwell College of Arts; the Art, Graphic Design and Geography programmes at University of Nevada, Reno; and Knowledge Exchange, UAL.

1. Kelly Chorpening and Rebecca Fortnum, eds, *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing*, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).

2. In the news at the time were the murders of sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, and Sarah Everard. Following the killings of Henry and Smallman, two police officers were jailed for sharing images of the crime scene. Everard was raped and murdered by a Metropolitan Police constable.

3. Je Yun Moon, 'Curatorial Research as the Practice of Commoning', in Carolina Rita and Bill Balaskas, eds, *Institution as Praxis: New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research* (London: Sternberg Press, 2020), pp.32–43, at p.41

4. Marsha Meskimmon and Phil Sawdon, eds, *Drawing Difference: Connections between Gender and Drawing* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), p.14.

5. Imani Jacqueline Brown, 'Ecological Witnessing', in Bridget Crone, Sam Nightingale and Polly Stanton, eds, *Fieldwork for Future Ecologies: Radical Practice for Art and Art-based Research* (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2022), pp.21–48 at p.37.

6. Helicon Collaborative (Alexis Fradz and Holly Sidford), 'Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Practice' (2017), available at static1.squarespace.com/static/5a8dfd48d74cffac3017261c/t/5d3ef580eddc910001c256c3/1564407180003/Mapping_the_Landscape_of_Socially_Engaged_Artistic_Practice_Sept2017.pdf, accessed 1 August 2023.

7. 'Drawing: Both Noun and Verb' was a presentation by Kelly Chorpening and Al Hassan Issah at Drawing Room on 25 September 2023.

Installation of *UNBUILD: a site of possibility* at Drawing Room, London, 2023. (Photograph Benjamin Deakin).

UNBUILD: a site of possibility

by Kate Macfarlane

'Every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory; qualities of space, matter and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle.'[1]

'...bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling. [...] spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body.'[2]

When bell hooks was asked to design her 'dream house' as a teenager in a high school art class, she imagined the different floors like the petals of a flower. A 'constant reader' living with a large family in a small space, she included endless 'stairways, window seats, hidden nooks and crannies' to which she could retreat and read in peace.[3] This childhood assignment was especially significant to the American author, educator, critic and activist because her living conditions at the time were cramped and overcrowded. The house that she imagined reflected what she lacked, but it also demonstrated what she already had: the imagination to create a 'place for the fulfillment of desire', which she never forgot.[4] As she wrote: 'despite its limitations, this assignment did teach us that, irrespective of our location, irrespective of class, race, and gender, we were all capable of inventing, transforming, making space.'[5]

UNBUILD: a site of possibility is conceived of in a similar spirit and is seen as a testing ground for Drawing Room's new building, as well as for drawing more widely. Some of the hallmarks of contemporary art – such as its commodity value, its ties to the individual artist as subject and its

associations with ambition and innovation – are obfuscated by the artists in *UNBUILD*. Drawing is exploited for its capacity to register movement and the passage of time in direct ways. Throughout the exhibition we encounter these traces – whether made by accident, machine or intention – which challenge the conventions of drawing as tied to a singular author. Here, as they have historically, artists turn to drawing in a spirit of conjecture and exploration, expecting an outcome that is provisional rather than resolved. Humble and prosaic materials facilitate expression without pressure for resolution and lend themselves to works that exist somewhere between construction and collapse. The material fragility and degradation that we associate with drawing signal transience and act as metaphors for the vulnerability of the human condition. They also advocate for new approaches, calling for an unbuilding of existing hierarchies to allow for social justice and more equitable ways of being.

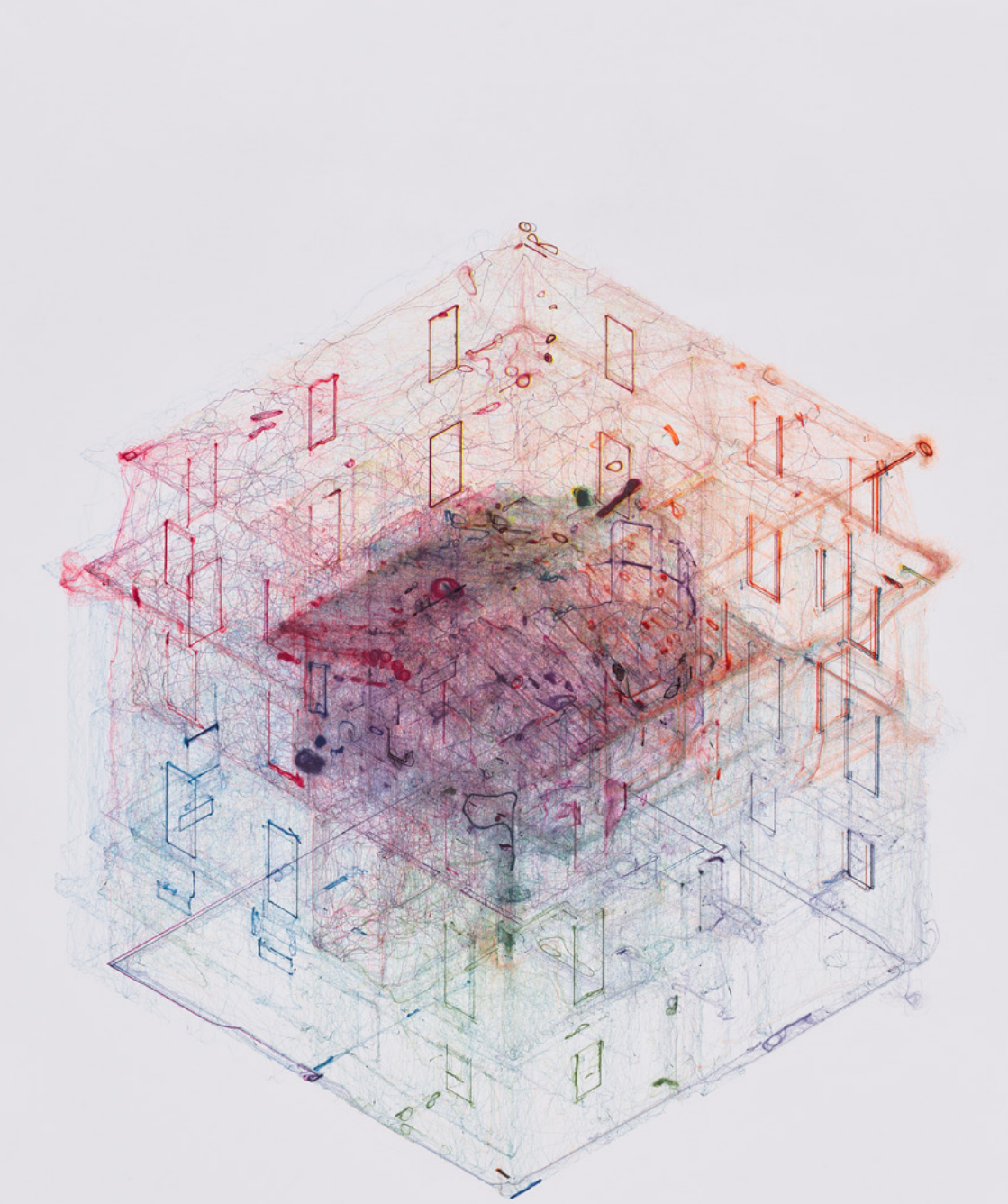
Installation view of *UNBUILD: a site of possibility* at Drawing Room, London, 2023, showing work by Tanoa Sasraku and Do Ho Suh. (Photograph Benjamin Deakin).

Do Ho Suh, studio view, 2022. (© Do Ho Suh; photograph Prudence Cuming).

Relinquishing control

Drawing underpins the varied work of Do Ho Suh. As a direct, material register that traces movement through space, it enables the artist to explore themes inspired by his itinerant life. When Suh moved from South Korea to the United States as a young adult, he became critically aware of his status as 'other' and of the imperialist attitudes pervading American society. This drove him to think about ways of making art that relinquish authorial control and invite accident. Suh's *ScaledBehaviour* drawings were made in collaboration with his studio team using architectural modelling software and a rendering robot: 'I like working with CNC robots because it counters the Western, imperialist idea of the artist as an individual genius, challenging the concept of the "authenticity" of the artist's hand.'[6] The series arose out of the conditions of COVID-19 lockdowns, particularly our heightened awareness of what we touch and the ways that we move through confined spaces. Working over Zoom, Suh and his team devised a new way of making drawings that continue his interest in the frailty of memory.

Suh is perhaps best known for life-size fabric replicas of his past and present homes and studios. The *HomeWithinHome* drawings included in *UNBUILD* take the same subject as a starting point, in particular the traditional Korean *hanok* where Suh lived as a child, and the boarding house in Rhode Island that became his first home after his relocation to the United States in the early 1990s. The isometric projection used in *ScaledBehaviour_drawing*



Do Ho Suh, *ScaledBehaviour_drawing (HomeWithinHome_isometric_E_01)*, 2023, robot, pen on paper, 98×88 cm. (© Do Ho Suh; photograph Prudence Cuming).

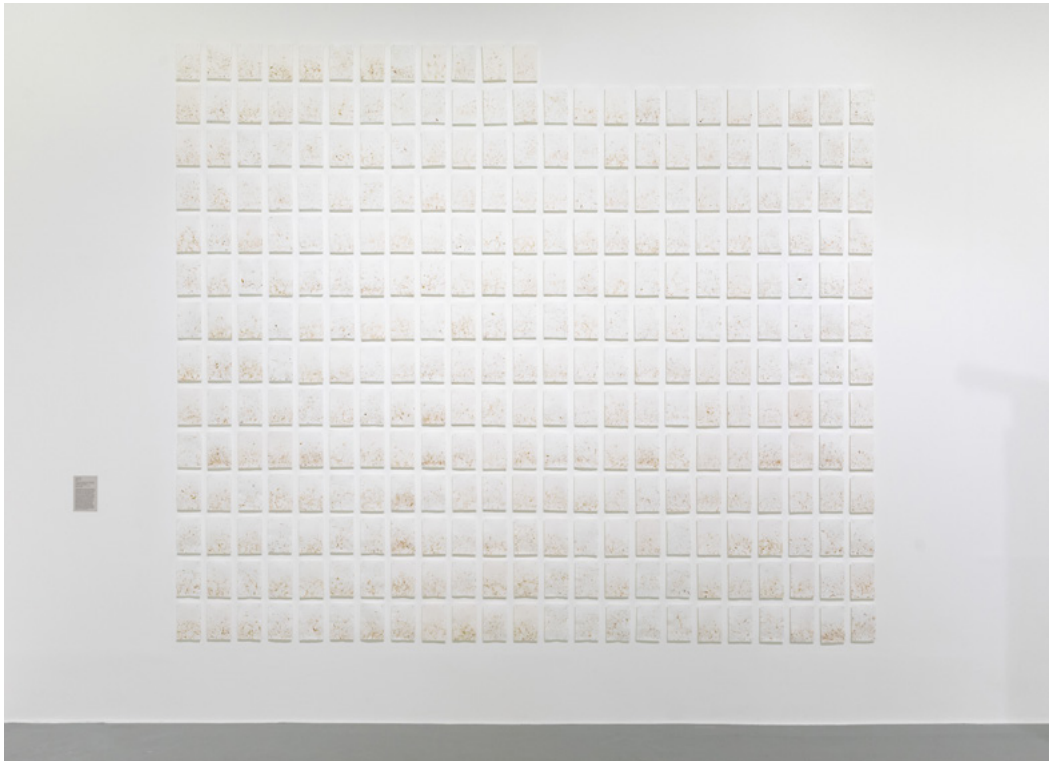
(HomeWithinHome_isometric_E_01) (2023) conveys the volume of a body, and the lines drawn by the robot distort the *hanok* at its centre, softening and rounding its contours; the circularity of the lines come to resemble a heart. 'The challenge was to make the *hanok* a distinct, defined volume, whilst also having it bleed into the other building.'[7] Fine lines trace the skeleton of the outer building, akin to veins spreading throughout the human body.

The iterative process of making these drawings mirrors the experience of memories being overwritten and slipping from our grasp. The accurate three-dimensional model is scrambled by a script that commands lines to respond to each other in random ways. Of interest to Suh and his team is that the same programme can drive such a diverse range of marks. The quality of paper and ink are contributing factors, for example, when using a biro, ink can build up on the nib before suddenly being expelled. The script takes on a life of its own: 'it behaves like a virus that's overtaken an area, or the way that ants come together.'[8] Such squiggles and congested areas of ink, as well as their random distribution, seem to visualise our entanglement with systems beyond our control. In *ScaledBehaviour_drawing (doorknob_elevation_40_D_01_overlay)* (2022), Suh has covered the robot's drawing of the doorknob with intuitive lines that form cell-like clusters and tubes, which could be arteries or electrical conduits. The artist seems to mimic the chance operations of the robot, yet the outcome is definitively organic, the horizontal orientation of the drawing suggesting a link to bodily organs rather than architectural structures.

Do Ho Suh, *ScaledBehaviour_drawing (doorknob_elevation_40_D_01_overlay)*, 2022, robot, pen on paper, 42 × 61.5 cm. (© Do Ho Suh; photograph Prudence Cuming).

ScaledBehaviour_Drawing (doorknob_elevation_48-H-01) (2022) is made up of myriad feathery lines that appear to be modulated by human touch. They are, in fact, laid down by the robot in successive applications of different colours. The machine works blindly, drawing lines that inexplicably converge at points across the paper, forming accumulations of ink that Suh refers to as 'blisters'. The script produces fascinating animations, and the artist regards the drawings as 'stills' taken from a process that is potentially infinite. In this group of drawings an image of the doorknob has been overwritten by an abstraction that conveys chance movement and touch, drawing attention to the object's everyday use rather than its functional construction. The proliferating, organic quality of the lines reflect a heightened sensitivity to the transmission of germs through touch. The loss of control and power enforced by the pandemic acted as a reminder of both the physical and social vulnerability of the human condition. Suh appears to ask what we can learn from artificial intelligence, from stepping back from a dominant position and providing opportunities for different forms of intelligence to flourish: 'I want to intervene less and less in the process and see what the script produces without my intervention.'[9]

This is also an approach actively employed by Jessie Brennan, whose socially engaged practice grapples with the role of artists in working with communities historically excluded from the arts and their right to the city. At Drawing Room, we invited Brennan to engage with our neighbours and encourage them to make use of our resources. She challenged our motivations: why do we want them to



Jessie Brennan, *To Agitate, Still*, 2023, handmade paper, daffodil, cotton and sisal, 311 sheets, each 21.5 × 14 cm. (Made in collaboration with Mandy Brannan and with thanks to the residents of the Setchell Estate; photograph Benjamin Deakin).

visit, what is our offer, whose culture does Drawing Room reflect? These conversations were humbling and we have learnt a great deal from Brennan's open-ended approach to the commission. Brennan chose as her focus the Setchell Estate, designed in 1971–72 and built in 1974–77 by British architects Michael Neylan and Bill Ungless. The estate epitomises an approach to post-war, low-rise housing that intended to create a sense of community, and it remains attractive today. Its abundant gardens and intimate courtyards are a testament to the architects whose design aimed to provide a connection to the ground and open air. Borrowing from community organising and active listening methods, residents led Brennan to the gardening group, with whom she worked over a number of weeks in spring 2023.

To Agitate, Still (2023) is the product of this labour in a very literal sense. The 311 sheets of paper that form the work are made from the pulp of daffodil leaves collected during the gardening sessions, which is mixed with cotton and sisal. The fibres in the handmade paper form lines of varying weights, lengths and colours, from golden to green and brown. Their diffusion is completely random and surprisingly mutable, ranging from dense agglomerations to sparser areas in which fibres disperse and scatter. Some lines leap into the foreground, while others sink back, more thoroughly absorbed in the materiality of the fibres. The unintentional lines are persuasive and life-affirming, in tune with the spirit of the daffodil, that first signifier of spring. 'I'm interested in the politics of a site but also the materiality and the aesthetics – I try to give equal balance to sensibilities or registers that off-set and challenge each other.'[10]

To Agitate, Still was Brennan's first foray into papermaking. It was also fabricated in collaboration with the book artist and papermaker Mandy Brannan, who produced half of the sheets. Although the process is exacting, it invites chance and intentional open-endedness. As Brennan describes, 'you need to agitate the liquid to move the plant matter around, which made me think of what we mean by cultural activism and how I can position my practice as an agitator – as a critical friend to Drawing Room.'[11] At Brennan's suggestion, we are offering the residents of the Setchell Estate the opportunity to use our Community Studio for activities they organise.[12] After the exhibition closes, *To Agitate, Still* will cease to exist as a unified artwork: the sheets will be gifted individually to the 311 households of the Setchell Estate. Here, drawing is positioned as a provisional medium, and the provocation to the conception of art as object – or as singular, contained image – pervades the exhibition.

Material registers

Tanoa Sasraku's *A Tower to Say Goodbye* (2021) hangs in mid-air. Measuring more than four metres in height, the work is commanding and yet is vulnerable in its partial disintegration. Sasraku thinks of it as 'an expansion, thickening and deepening of drawing'.[13] It began life as a sketch based on her partner's family tartan cloth. When she was offered a residency at a disused postal sorting office in west London, the artist decided to scale up the drawing: 'it's really exciting to take something so pure and push it to a point where it can feel so dominating and powerful in scale and on the verge of collapse – I find that really interesting as a way to subvert drawing.'[14]

A Tower to Say Goodbye is a confluence of how the sorting office, slated for demolition, marked Sasraku and how she marked it. The building opens into a bright parquet-floored hall and contracts into a spiralling red staircase, leading to the basement. Here, pink wallpaper and paint are blistered, and the doors and skirting boards are scuffed and worn – all signifiers of how the building has been used and subsequently neglected over its sixty-year life. Sasraku built up layers of paper, echoing the temporality of the building and her time spent in it, and impregnated these with pink-hued soft-pastel dust, before stitching them together. This stage of production involved precision and labour in manoeuvring the large work, now comprising twenty layers of paper, through a domestic sewing machine.

The artist's commitment to paper, stitching and pattern is inspired by memories of watching her Ghanaian father – the couture designer Kofi Ansah – as he selected fabrics for their emotional resonance, cut out patterns and then, combining paper and material, created items of clothing. For Sasraku, after the stitching of the thickened paper sheets, there came a form of violent catharsis. The artist doused the work with water, enabling her to excavate the layers: to rupture the pieces intuitively in an act of exposure. 'The tearing and removal in this work was a way to use destruction as a gesture in drawing so the work is a subtractive collage of many drawings that are stitched together [...] I keep returning to the medium of drawing again and again because I'm chasing the excitement of the risk of what can happen and fail.'[15]

Sasraku made *A Tower to Say Goodbye* on the floor and, as a result of deliberate rubbing, the parquet floor of the sorting office was imprinted on the work. Drenching the layers of paper also led to additional, accidental registers of the worn floor tiles. Sasraku coined the term 'Terratype' to describe these 'earth photographs', which 'capture site through mark making or pigments foraged from the earth'.[16] At the same time, the artist's process of production harnesses the immaterial qualities of buildings: 'I've tried to actualise emotions, feelings and memories I was experiencing during lockdown and material residues

Tanoa Sasraku, *A Tower to Say Goodbye*, 2021, newsprint, soft pastel, fixative, polyester thread, linen thread and PVA glue, 401 x 260 cm. (Collection of Lorenzo Legarda Leviste and Fahad Mayet; photograph Benjamin Deakin)

of the space.'[17] Not long after completing *A Tower to Say Goodbye*, Sasraku described it as 'one of the most honest works' she has ever made: it's 'not coloured at all by any expectation of me to make something that is representational of my identity in direct ways but is much more about feeling and process.'[18] Soft newsprint paper, pastel pigment and thread register the movement of the body through time and space. Seeing the work afresh two years after it was made, the artist was struck by its relationship to the human body, its resemblance to muscle and skin, with clear markers of the aging process.

Evoking similar bodily connotations, Ian Kiaer's commission *Endnote limb, yellow sag* (2023) consists of a large, biomorphic form, which hangs from the gallery ceiling and comes to rest on the floor. Fabricated from a patchwork of clear and mustard-coloured plastic sheeting, the precarious container is inflated by means of a domestic fan heater. The artist states that he's interested in the building as an 'organ' or a 'bag', as 'this big, saggy impotent thing, both suspended but also hanging down – the contradictory impulse of trying to fill the space with its presence but somehow failing, implying a kind of weakness.'[19]

A two-part wall-mounted work brackets the inflatable, its material qualities resonating with the textures and colours of the three-dimensional form. A sheet of reclaimed

Tanoa Sasraku, detail of *A Tower to Say Goodbye*, 2021, newsprint, soft pastel, fixative, polyester thread, linen thread and PVA glue. (Collection of Lorenzo Legarda Leviste and Fahad Mayet; photograph Benjamin Deakin).

Plexiglass forms the top layer of the work, replete with marks, stains, scratches and blemishes – reminders of the inevitable degradation of material over time. The second layer, a sheet of wrinkled paper with uneven pigmentation, similarly registers the time and process of its production. Kiaer laid the thin, Korean paper on an uneven surface and used a watercolour technique that saturates the substrate, forcing the pigment to gather at creases and indentations. A drawing of electrical cables, plugs and switches reference key elements of the sculpture, including the fan that inflates it and the LED lights that form a drawing inside it. These are drawn tentatively and in a vertical orientation. By contrast, in physical form, the LED strips create insistent, ready-made horizontal lines. Despite the rigidity of their material quality, the lights appear to have been discarded, littering the floor of the sculpture, a reminder of its temporary formal status and imminent return to base material.

Kiaer likes to work with salvaged materials, which – in their wear and tear, distressed surfaces and edges – evidence another, past life. The artist also employs materials often found in the building trade, which bring different associations – if one thinks of buildings as extensions of ourselves, with insulation and plastic sheeting akin to the clothes that shelter us from the elements. Kiaer encountered the yellow insulation material that forms his vast sculpture while visiting the Bauhaus University, Weimar: ‘it was difficult to place, somewhere between the

Ian Kiaer, *Endnote limb, yellow sag*, 2023, Perspex, acrylic, gel and pencil on paper, polyethylene, LED lighting and fan, dimensions variable. (Courtesy Alison Jacques; photograph Benjamin Deakin).

synthetic and organic. I'm always interested in the tone a material conveys, its associations whether bodily or some other substance that could be toxic even [...] it's such an extraordinary material, so important for housing and energy efficiency. Yet it's usually covered up and remains hidden, the inner skin that we're not conscious of, but I find it strangely suggestive.'[20]

The organic, shape-shifting form has a relationship to Frederick John Kiesler's *Endless House*, a visionary architectural concept begun in the 1950s, which is an ongoing reference point for Kiaer. A twentieth-century architect well known for questioning the direction in which Modernism was moving, Kiesler wished to return to a relationship between architectural structures, the body and the earthbound. Kiaer's organic form appears alive, its inflation is evocative of respiration, resonating with Kiesler's aspiration that *Endless House* operate as a living organism. Over time, a fine layer of dust will collect on the surface of *Endnote limb, yellow sag*: an intangible quality signalling the occupation of space, blurring the boundary between body and building. 'I like the relationship between skin and dust – as being a household presence, a consequence of bodies, time and dwelling.'[21]

The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas could be seen as a modern equivalent of Kiesler, in his concern for the ways in which people inhabit and move about in space, as well

Ian Kiaer, detail of *Endnote limb, yellow sag*, 2023, Perspex, acrylic, gel and pencil on paper, polyethylene, LED lighting and fan. (Courtesy Alison Jacques; photograph Benjamin Deakin).

as his use of asymmetry and of non-traditional colours and materials. His influence on Kiaer can be felt in the artist's use of LED lights and clashing materials, ranging from the artificial to the organic and natural. These contrasts are evident in Kiaer's close attention to surface quality, which varies between opaque, translucent and semi-translucent, and matt and reflective. Oscillations in material quality suggest speculation and impermanence, acting as metaphors for the passing of time and for the ways in which we inhabit, all at once, the past, the present and the future.

Holding things together

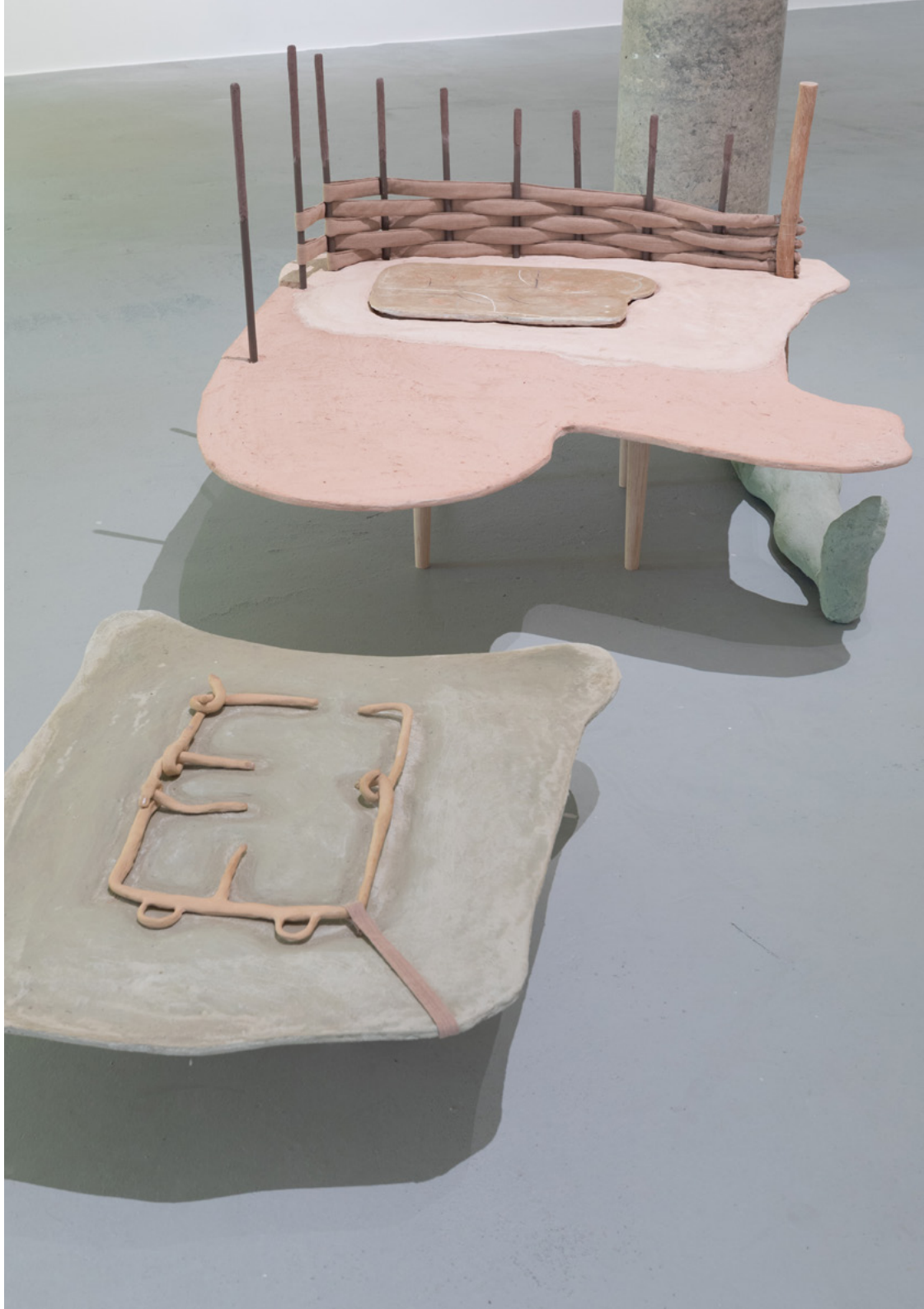
Sharing qualities with the work of Kiaer and Sasraku, *Fossa* (2023), Emily Speed's commission for *UNBUILD*, exists at the intersection of construction and destruction, of building and unbuilding. As the artist explains, '*Fossa* is a hybrid, part body, part building [...] it explores how we occupy our own body and how buildings effect our bodies [...] there is a precariousness about it – a just holding on.'[22]

The word fossa is an anatomical term that describes a depression or hollow, most commonly used to refer to concave areas found in bone. Initially a working title, it gave the artist a space to fill – the licence to fill a void – and it was important this was done with her own hands. Speed used the opportunity to learn a number of different techniques, mostly drawn from the field of architecture. Many of us can relate to the fumbling process of learning through doing and by making mistakes, as we muddle through life, just managing to hold things together. Speed has used natural materials including wood, goat hair and clay, selected for their capacity to return to the earth, thus writing life cycles into the language of the work.

Fossa forms a nominal knee joint consisting of two platforms, which appear to float above the floor. A scaffold rises out of the larger slab, which recalls the ancient building technique of wattle and daub, but here, interlacing fabric fingers replace the wooden branches. On the second, smaller platform, a floor plan is composed of stretched and pliable ceramic fingers, the tensile digits grasping one

another to form rooms. Uncanny but also humorous, these interlocking fingers convey reciprocity and adaptability. More widely, they signify Speed's commitment to bringing women together and empowering them through creative collaboration. A life-size leg is attached to the platform by means of a large wooden pin, a moveable joint that one might associate with mannequins and dolls. Larger-than-life fingers made from padded fabric clutch the edges of the structure, their soft material defying the task of holding it together. 'I am thinking about how you trace space literally with the body – how you feel you have to hold on, clutching at the edges of things.'[23]

Speed's practice is concerned with the body and architecture. As she explains: 'I'm interested in the structures of power within that, who gets to build, historically the role of women in terms of occupying and owning space.'[24] *Fossa* is part-dwelling and part-stage, open and unfinished; it's a site of potential that sits in obstinate opposition to contemporary house construction, which is still largely governed by men and reflects capitalist values associated with luxury lifestyles. The reality is that, across the world, women take on roughly three times as much unpaid care and domestic work than men, spending more time in home settings, particularly in kitchens.[25]



Emily Speed, detail of *Fossa*, 2023, plywood, plaster, sand, goat hair, pearl glue, natural pigments, fired stoneware, fir branch, dowel, linen, cotton, wadding, magnets, crayon on paper and wire. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Benjamin Deakin).

Possible futures

Fossa both explores connections – between different materials, ways of making and being – and the fragility of such connections. 'Finger tips are tender, touch is tender – it's not all doom [...] Community is an important part of it and here I'm thinking about families – the little communities we build – like micro versions of society.'[26] Existing at the cusp of imagination and lived experience, *Fossa* is a visceral response to Speed's domestic situation, while also suggesting new ways to live.

Speed's commission takes a sculptural form but all of her work stems from drawing: 'my thought processes are entwined with drawing, which is something to do with the provisional and the fragmented [...] these processes bring a sense of precariousness to all of my works.'[27] The artist learnt scagliola, a technique that involves embedding pigments in plaster as a way to draw sculpturally. It initially gained popularity in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was used in the building of churches and other grand buildings to mimic marble. In contrast, Speed's earth pigments are embedded in plaster to form a provisional, sketchy floor plan. These labour-intensive operations subvert both scagliola as a technique of artifice and the medium of drawing as quick and easy.

The Bauhaus artist Josef Albers challenged his students to salvage materials from rubbish tips and to understand materials and colours by defying expectations and their own eyes – to 'swindle themselves', as he liked to put it.[28]

Albers' motivation for encouraging such material explorations are taken up by the artists in *UNBUILD*, who similarly challenge tradition through unexpected juxtapositions and methodologies. Working with unconventional materials and techniques can trigger the imagination and counter-intuitive thinking and lead to outcomes that surprise the artists themselves. The primal elements of our contemporary condition unconsciously leaks into the very fabric of the artworks, acknowledging that our built environment shapes our experience of the world.

The artworks in *UNBUILD* suggest that an attention to materials and process might be a way to move forwards generatively, to counter the passive ways in which our lives are reflected back at us as a constant flow of images. Sasraku sees *A Tower to Say Goodbye* as a monument to a modest drawing in her sketchbook, its partial collapse 'standing as a metaphor for the collapse of her relationship with her partner and the collapse of life as we knew it pre-COVID, as the tide of late-capitalism temporarily ground to a halt, suggesting that there was hope for a new system to exist in'.[29] In conversation with other artists in *UNBUILD* Brennan suggested: 'We share an interest in collapse, destruction and care [...] we're not doing things for total collapse – the end of things – we're doing it for a particular kind of collapse.'[30] Despite the suffering that the pandemic caused, it manifested as a global jolt to the status quo. Its aftermath coincided with a period during which Drawing Room was in transition, between its itinerant and permanent home, providing opportunities for a rethinking

of priorities and focus. As Alberto Duman writes in 'We feel agitated', if Drawing Room is to carry through the intentions of *UNBUILD*, we have to 'be accountable for our own positionality and to those with lived experiences of modernity and coloniality, to actively labour towards our stated intention for change to survive'.[31]

Looking at *A Tower to Say Goodbye* today, Sasraku acknowledges the extent to which the particular conditions of lockdown and an opportunity to work site-specifically gave her 'a space to dream anything'.[32] This was her first 'Terratype' and one that followed, *Yellow Gate (Terratype)* (2021), was included in *The Laboratory of the Future*, the 18th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice, 2023. Curated by the Ghanaian-Scottish academic and novelist Lesley Lokko, this exhibition expanded the discipline of architecture to include art, games, activism and performance, to showcase what can be realised by people who don't have the power and resources to build large, permanent structures.[33] Lokko's cross-disciplinary approach celebrates the power of the imagination and suggests ways towards decolonising architecture by drawing on methodologies that don't rely on the exploitation of others. In *The Laboratory of the Future*, drawing is used as a propositional tool that readily intersects with other media, an approach also embraced by the artists in *UNBUILD*. Here, we return to bell hooks and her belief in the transformational capacity of art, that we are 'all capable of inventing, transforming and inventing space' if we have a few building blocks with which to begin. Both *UNBUILD* and *Drawing in Social Space* suggest that the modest medium of drawing can be a building block through which Drawing Room 'can learn more and more and be open to diverse voices' – through which we hope to make a contribution to more equitable ways of being.[34]

1. Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), p.45.

2. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p.9.

3. bell hooks, 'Black Vernacular: Architecture as Cultural Practice', in *idem, Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), pp.145–51, at p145.

4. *Ibid*.

5. *Ibid*., p.146.

6. Do Ho Suh, in conversation with the author (21 September 2023).

7. George Bolwell of Do Ho Suh studio, in conversation with the author via Zoom (14 July 2023).

8. *Ibid*.

9. Do Ho Suh, *op. cit*. (note 6).

10. Jessie Brennan, in conversation with George Bray of Drawing Room (21 September 2023).

11. *Ibid*.

12. A new facility, the Community Studio will host community-focused creative projects. A second, important legacy of Brennan's commission is an extension of Drawing Room's Neighbourhood Connection Project, which will employ two local people to grow the relationship with Setchell Estate residents and invite new connections with its neighbours.

13. Tanoa Sasraku, quoted from 'Arts Foundation Visual Arts award Press Release' (2021).

14. Tanoa Sasraku, in conversation with George Bray (21 September 2023).

15. *Ibid*.

16. *Ibid*.

17. *Ibid*.

18. Tanoa Sasraku, *op. cit*. (note 13).

19. Ian Kiaer, in email correspondence with the author (7 August 2023).

20. *Ibid*.

21. *Ibid*.

22. Emily Speed, in conversation with the author and Kirsty Badenoch via Zoom (5 September 2023).

23. Emily Speed, in conversation with George Bray (21 September 2023).

24. *Ibid*.

25. As the second artist in residence at Energy House 2.0, Salford, Speed is gaining insight into priorities informing the design of housing, see 'Emily Speed announced as second Artist in Residence at Energy House 2.0' (3 July 2023), available at artcollection.salford.ac.uk/2023/07/03/emily-speed-announced-as-second-artist-in-residence-at-energy-house-2-0, accessed 15 October 2023.

26. *Ibid*.

27. *Ibid*.

28. Charles Darwent, review of *Joseph Albers: Late Modernism, and Pedagogic Form, The Burlington Magazine* 165 (2023), pp.670–71, at p.671.

29. Tanoa Sasraku, in email correspondence with author (12 October 2023).

30. Jessie Brennan, in conversation with *UNBUILD* workshop artists (12 June 2023).

31. Alberto Duman, 'We feel agitated', in this publication, p.70.

32. Tanoa Sasraku, *op. cit*. (note 14).

33. The intersection between race and space lies at the heart of Lokko's work, ; see Lesley Naa Norle Lokko, ed.: *White Papers, Black Marks: Race, Culture, Architecture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

34. Alberto Duman, *op. cit*. (note 31), p.70.

Installation view of *UNBUILD: a site of possibility* at Drawing Room, London, 2023, showing work by Tanoa Sasraku and Jessie Brennan. (Photograph Benjamin Deakin).

We feel agitated

Alberto Duman

Pages 65, 68, 73 and 77: Jessie Brennan, detail of *To Agitate, Still*, 2023, handmade paper, daffodil, cotton and sisal. (Made in collaboration with Mandy Brannan and with thanks to the residents of the Setchell Estate; photograph Alberto Duman).

The feeling

We feel agitated.
We have been agitated for some time.
We make time to remain agitated.

We keep this matter in a stage of agitation.
We don't expect these matters to be settled any time soon.
We stay with it.

We see them as fragments of possible redemption.
We talk to others who also feel this.
We make provisions for how 'we can build worlds we deserve'.[1]

And. We don't know exactly who is We.

It's a We erupting out of a particular kind of pluralising, of a struggle for speaking out of ourselves, looking for a We in the world.

It's an approach to being in the world that acknowledges the situatedness of our positionality and the ways in which the modern colonial order of aesthetics continues to shape our experiences in unique but interdependent ways.

'What happens when we pluralise the place where we are thinking from?'[2]

We are feeling agitated by forces around us that structure our context.
We are being agitated by matter in flux at a particular historical conjuncture.

We, ourselves, are matter in flux.

We are agitating it to keep it in flux, so We can see the elements that compose it, the forces that wish it to be settled in facile narratives and visualise those doing the stirring.

It would always be wise not to overstretch the use of the plural, lest we end up speaking out of terms for those absent ones, or we disrespectfully claim individual ownership of our thinking.

But this is a We that stakes its claims in a rejection of the isolated subjectivity of our being in the city.

It may be the We of those in the room – as they say 'the right people are the people in the room' – when they come together for prefigurative work, to make space for different futures while hospicing the present in its agitation.

It's the We that was manifested in the original 'mission statement' for the community centre Centerprise, as explained by founder Margaret Gosley when she was interviewed by Rosa Schling: 'we are a group of people composed of who we are'.[3]

'What do we do as practitioners, as thinkers?
Of course, this "we" is as problematic as we can imagine.'[4]

The making

'There is a lot to learn if we listen to the practitioners.'[5]

I'm listening and looking closely at what kind of community infrastructures Jessie Brennan's has emerged from, the methods she worked with, the time she spent, the spaces she walked into and the ideas that empowered her choices.

And then, I acknowledge how it all went into the blender...

All that's left is a slushy condensed matter ready to be laid out into 311 sheets of handmade paper, to be redistributed to Setchell Estate residents, one for each household.

This is where she foraged the plant matter gathered during gardening sessions, which emerged from conversations with a resident named Josephine, a Nigerian woman in her late seventies, whose gentle and constant dedication to the shared green spaces of the estate acted as a condenser of the ideas to this work.

The amalgamate of daffodil, cotton and sisal produced by the harvesting, drying and blending holds in its gooey suspension more than its component parts.

The carefully staged passing of this matter from one state to another also functions like a provisional holding place, a hospicing locus where the personal and cultural histories contained in the memory of the gleaned matter are activated anew, like molecules vigorously shaken in homoeopathic dilutions.

It's all in the fragments of perception of floral beauty, the shreds of conversations held around them during the harvest and the vows of intentionality attempting to answer the question 'what is to be done?'

We're still aware that all that's left of life's experience in between sensing and knowing, is just a formless gloop full of possibilities, a think-feel mushy potion of possible becomings, ebbing and flowing in the excesses of the agitated turmoil.

'Beauty is not a luxury; rather it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical act

of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given. It is a will to adorn, a proclivity for the baroque, and the love of too much.'[6]

The agitated time of the suspension also affords some cultural forensics, where seemingly inert and neutral species like daffodils are laying bare the politics of 'Colonial and Postcolonial deployment' of its image in action, sending forth its demand for us to remain agitated, attentive, caring and complex.[7]

Surely, for many, there are 'A host, of golden daffodils; / Beside the lake, beneath the trees / Fluttering and dancing in the breeze', but for others, within the same lines there's also a restless reminder of how the power of the poetic can be mobilised and weaponised into servile narratives, the purpose of which is to order aesthetic perceptions and sensibilities.[8]

The effect is to flatten the very horizon that poetry opens up beyond language by fencing the freedoms it induces into submissive enclosures, their official interpretations acting like a colonisation of the mind.

In the syncopated movement of the vats filled with the pulped, blended substance, this dark historical matter is agitated too, claiming its own harvest, asserting its own historical sedimentation in the here and now, speaking of ruptures and alignments that only an active and wilful silencing of the past could produce.[9]

What the agitation allows us to see is simultaneity and complexity against ghosting, reductionism and silencing; it allows us to see that a year before its famous evocation of daffodils, the same poet would write an elegy to Toussaint Louverture, the figurehead of the Haitian Revolution, who would die in a jail in France two months later.[10]

'It is about facing our complicity in violence and unsustainability and its implications with the courage of really seeking to connect with the collective pain, past, present and future.'[11]

Mandy Brannan, the papermaker that Jessie has collaborated with, introduced other words into the mix: couching (pronounced 'coo-ching'), is the term papermakers use to describe transferring a newly formed sheet of paper from the mould to the felts.

So, when we look at these apparently innocuous 311 pieces of handmade paper, we are also seeing the repeated and unique outcomes – more like attempts at desired results – of instinctive and happenstance decision-making. Each one of them becomes the freeze-framed, washed-up recording of the chosen rhythm of the agitation, the only existing snapshot of one-off moments of 'letting go', deliberated by pulling the 'picture' onto the mould.

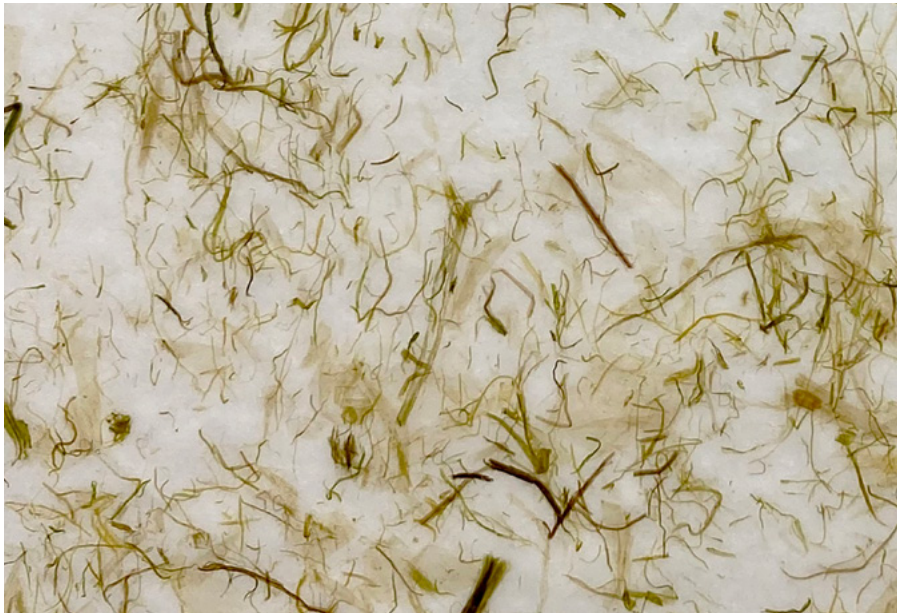
By this, we understand that the overall result is an anxious taxonomy, a restless botany, borne of agitation: the *'heart with pleasure fills'*, neither with the sublime, nor with the picturesque, but with a tainted sense of apprehension and

disquiet which exists mostly outside of the frame.[12]

If *'freedom is the distance between the hunter and the hunted'* this here is a conditional, nervous freedom, to be found between charged matter in flux and its multiple surface settlements, sheets of trial and no error.[13]

It's also a space to be found in different and simultaneous time zones.

'To be nervous is to be aware of time as multiple, as disjunctive [...] We can't avoid recognizing that we are all out of sync.'[14]



The poetics

'We live in a perpetually burning building, and what we must save from it, all the time, is love.'[15]

Today, there are many cultural prompts that would suggest we recast a colonial memory of recognition and symbolic retribution in our cities, as if everything was seen in a rear-view mirror of history, leaving us on a linear path towards other futures, wilfully or tactically amnesiac.

But still. We feel agitated, haunted by the awareness that the temporality of colonial violence is never linear and that the presences we feel are not just some distant atmospheres of a settled temporality.

They are more likely to embody very present feelings of incredulity and a reluctance to acquiesce to its current settlement and its flattening of positions anywhere in the world. These are histories that actively disturb the present.[16]

Kicking up a storm and then leaving the scene may be painful and traumatic enough. To look at every single frame or fragment of the storm in its passing, as though each one contained some unique truth, is about granting just a little more time to objecthood in its forming stage of process, and see what may reside in the creases of its thinginess.

It's about making space for different times.
It's about drawing choreographies for dances not yet devised.
It's about trusting the people in the room, the We.

This is something Jessie knows well, so adept in sensing the flourishings and the pitfalls of working relationally and contextually and, in many of her projects, redeploying the 'crumple' as a visual device so that narratives need not run merely in one direction.[17]

It's about realising through perception that the matter in flux we are agitating is constantly prefiguring a different future, it's an anticipatory action, something like *'gesturing towards a decolonial future'*, speaking through the We of a collective.[18]

'What is the grammar that makes things legible and thus the only things that become real and ideal? If you want to put the world in a box, what is the size of this box and is it a square box? How does the world need to be, in order to be contained in this box? So we talk about illegibilities: things that are viable, but unimaginable, unthinkable within this grammar.'[19]

In resisting the deployment and weaponisation of poetry – as in the case of Wordsworth's 'daffodils' – we also resist the same agencies that force instrumentalisation, institutionalisation and fixity onto the matter in flux of social practice and socially engaged art.

'At a moment of increasing institutionalization of social practice (the appearance of curricula and strict guidelines for scholarships or grants), we run the risk of losing alternative imaginings. By narrowing down and fixing social practice's past, we also fix and preempt its future.'[20]

A variety of open, yet-to-be present futures is also embedded into the work itself, an invisible social watermark borne from Jessie's demands to Drawing Room to instigate and institute an invitation to the neighbouring Setchell Estate as part of her commission.

Each unique specimen emerging from the repetitive ritual of its making acquires the essence of a bond, a value to be redeemed as access to Drawing Room, its facilities, archived knowledge, meeting spaces and other possible claims to its assets not yet envisaged.

What is to move institutions onto less-travelled paths if not the demands of the artists who are its constituents? It's a

We kind of thinking, less about the *'owning'* and more about the *'owing'*.[21]

Jessie's demands persuaded decision-makers towards self-reflexivity, affording her provocations to be heard when they landed.

Her 'work' as artist in this context asked: *'What do we want the project to be, to do, and who for?'*[22]

The politics

'When culture and art materialises into the contemporary city we must not just ask "what art?" or "what culture?", but also "what city?" and crucially "for whom?"'[23]

'This project announces Drawing Room's intent – to use the medium of drawing to begin to unbuild existing institutional and societal hierarchies, to demolish the obstacles that prevent access to culture and creativity and to bring people together.'[24]

We have so far conceived in the poetic terms of artmaking, that the matter in flux we are agitating is constantly prefiguring a different future.

But in the different grammar of urban cultural politics at the 'world-class' city scale, the composition of regeneration atmospheres coerces 'culture' to operate as an intangible aesthetic asset to increase property values, while the housing market adopts the unbridled, ultimate mobility and unlimited growth of the financial investments that underwrite its reach and activity.

These inherent, operative mechanisms turn the possible future potentialities of matter in flux into the tangible temporalities of land and property investments, where only future presents count: the symbolic turns into the financial.

It's in these crossing points between poetics and politics that a fracture is exposed between present futures yet-to-be-written and future presents teeming with agitation, linear narratives of urban development traded and exchanged for wealth creation, which are intrinsically prone to anticipation and colonisation.

'In the utter uncertainty of the present, the time of the global institution and its own planning (whether business or cultural seems not to matter anymore) is the one that asserts its ownership, it prefigures and articulates future urban landscapes visually and aurally and sets their goals to achieve them through marketing and management.'[25]

The intrinsic structural inequalities that global capital investments in London reproduce in their imaginaries still connect colonial pasts with the politics of the present: a toxic discourse agitated by populist and deceptive identity politics and misplaced nostalgia for empires – misplaced because the inherent logic of Empire has never truly left this world.

Indeed, the sadness of the present lies mostly in the manifested arrogance of a psychotic, recalcitrant, dead-on-arrival whiteness structural complex, which does not wish to come to terms with its own deadly inheritance at the root of it all, pretending instead to be free to roam: *'White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.'*[26]

How can a decolonisation agenda and worldbuilding of alternative futures in artistic activity and community action impact these trajectories of financial imaginaries, besides the routinely vacuous statutory consultation processes with 'key community groups and local stakeholders' or the traumatic stirrings of riots?

'Decolonial thought starts with the awareness that there is no modernity without coloniality, that the history of progress of Western civilisation cannot be accounted for without the violence of coloniality, that there is no possession without dispossession; that there is no claim to contemporaneity without erasure.'[27]

A different future can also begin in the past.

11 July 2023 marked the forty-year anniversary of the official release of The People's Plan for the Royal Docks, but neither the Greater London Authority Royal Docks Team,

nor the Mayoralty in their new home at Royal Victoria Dock, were anywhere to be seen in acknowledging or celebrating this historic event for London.

The People's Plan remains a truly remarkable example of a community plan initiative, which in 1983 envisioned an alternative future for the closed docks, through the efforts of local people and the support of the Popular Planning Unit of the Greater London Council.[28]

In the political discourse of urban development in London, the last decade has offered some interesting arguments and debates as to what's worth and not worth salvaging from the ultimate monetisation drive that has clearly submerged this city since the running up to and in the aftermath of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Jessie Brennan, *The People's Plan*, 2019, large-scale graphics, dimensions variable. (Commissioned by UP Projects; photograph Thierry Bal).

In the creation of atmospheres of global investment in the city, everything entered into 'Regeneration Supernova' mode. Ten years later, the marketing ploy of 'London is moving East' has crystallised into the Mayoral office actually moving East, into the building once called the Siemens Crystal.[29]

Out of these urban agitations and survival struggles, which appeared still to be in some flux only a decade ago, a new pecking order has emerged and established itself – one in which 'culture' has played a decisive role as the key asset in an aesthetic economy of the city; one that can shift the value of a private development upwards through the facilitation of public administration mechanisms and their planning agreement conditions.

As part of a sustained research and policy drive by the Greater London Authority Culture and Creative Industries Unit, now institutionally supported and absorbed into its plan by the Mayoral office (regardless of the transition between parties on the Mayoral seat), an argument has been won in regards to the value that 'culture' brings to London and the need to protect its infrastructures.[30]

This successful discourse at the heart of London's governance, in turn, has empowered an array of policies, tools and mechanisms with the aim of protecting the survival and reproduction of this value across the city.

From Creative Enterprise Zones to the parcelling of Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy for artistic and cultural institutions of various sizes, and the now-common treaties between studio providers and private housebuilders, the impulse 'to protect' creative production in London against the market onslaught has indeed been very successful, to the degree that a whole new ecology of 'win-win' alliances between developers, city governance and cultural institutions and producers has emerged.

Today, Tannery Arts – of which Drawing Room is a part – is a privileged recipient of this ecology of survival and protection, by positioning itself as the beneficiary of a Section 106 agreement brokered by Southwark Council, which granted it a twenty-five-year lease in a newly built permanent site in the Rich Industrial Estate development by London Square.

On the one hand, this form of urban privilege has been rightfully accrued by the enduring success of Drawing Room throughout its twenty years of nomadic existence, confirmed as a matter of self-evident 'excellence' through its status as an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and the broad network of its direct supporters.

On the other hand, in the urban atmosphere of intense, predatory and sometimes ruthless development of London growth, for an art organisation to be granted a Section 106 recipient status in a new, privately built, speculative development still constitutes a privilege vis-à-vis the needs of other players.

In keeping with its declared aims, can we think of the exercise of this privilege as an operative intentionality, acting as an intersectional paralegal deed attached to the legitimate presence of Drawing Room in this place, in this time, in this London?

What can we yield from the prompt to 'Unbuild' at the very time of completion of the built environment? And what can occur when we shift from the singular 'possibility' to the plural, complex and contradictory 'possibilities'? Can we read more than virtue signalling and changes in programming and seek a more decisive structural change, driven by a decolonial agenda?

Jessie has nurtured the conversations with Drawing Room and the Setchell Estate, seizing those invisible, inaudible instances of discursive possibilities in the world as opportunities for the institution to learn more and again.

For Drawing Room and its renewed mandate in the neighbourhood, it would mean to radically open itself to diverse voices; to be accountable for its own positionality and to those with lived experiences of modernity and coloniality; to learn the lessons that need to be learnt; and to actively labour towards its stated intentionalities for change to survive – let alone thrive – and for the possibilities of such learnings to influence, shape and steer the organisation's governance.

Through this projection into an open-ended future, the self-inscribed paralegal mandate of the 'room' within the 'room' would be read as an entente that could make a so-called 'neighbourhood connection' initiative truly meaningful and upfront in its code of conduct.

It would mean making the iron gates separating the street from the courtyard less harmful in their elegant bisecting violence, safe keeping and unfortunate material presence – objects that themselves counter the very things that the artists supposedly wish to explore.

It would take an unseeing of the very materiality of the gates, understood otherwise as an imaginary interface between the built and unbuilt, hard matter redeployed as a discursive tool, a matter in flux truly ready to be unmade, dematerialised by the quality of the invitation for making space.

It might mean to feel the agitation of the real, without escaping too easily into representation and its instrumentalised manufacturing of settled narratives.
It could mean making space for the time it takes for spaces to change. It would mean to practise a decolonial pedagogy of neighbourhood relations, rooted in the plural possibilities of anticipatory alternative futures and their nurturing. It should mean the acceptance of staying agitated, 311 times over, leading to thousands more 'cooching' possibilities.

It means for the We, to come back to the We.
Still, agitated, nervous, uneasy.
But also open, in a planetary dimension, learning in a truly lifelong manner.
It means aiming for *'whiteness to become just another colour in the rainbow'*.[31]

We might then begin to accept an array of new prospects, based on an awareness of our positioned realities.

It could flip Drawing into the Draw In.
It could mean turning the 'room' into a World.

Gates to Drawing Room's premises on New Tannery Way. (Photograph Emma Morley).

1. See Ajay Parasram and Alex Khasnabish: 'How Can We Build the World We Deserve', in *Frequently Asked White Questions* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2022), n.p.

2. Rolando Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity: Decolonial Aesthesis and the end of the contemporary*, (Amsterdam: Mondrian Fund, 2020), p.xxv.

3. Rosa Schling, *The Lime Green Mystery: An Oral history of the Centeprise co-operative* (London: On the Record, 2017). The recent exhibition at PEER Gallery, London (23 June – 9 September 2023) also takes its name from Gosley's phrase. The group exhibition traces artistic, cultural and social collective work that took place in Hackney between 1971 and 1986. Bringing together new commissions, existing artwork, literature, film and archival material, the exhibition and accompanying events programme explores the radical, influential and often entwined histories of cooperative and collective work in the borough. See www.peeruk.org/we-are-a-group-of-people, accessed 5th September 2023.

4. Carlos Garrido Castellano, quoted from Helen Carey, 'Art Activism for an Anticolonial Future: a conversation with Carlos Garrido Castellano', *Community Development Journal* (13 October 2022), doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsac027.

5. *Ibid*.

6. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals* (London: Profile Books, 2020), p.60, cited in Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes*, (London: Daunt Books Originals, 2023), p.79.

7. For a valuable conversation about these opposed readings of Wordsworth's 'Daffodils', see Karen Welberry, 'Colonial and Postcolonial Deployment of "Daffodils"', *Kunapipi*, Vol.19, Issue 1 (1997), available at ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2460&context=kunapipi, accessed 5 September 2023.

8. William Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (commonly known as 'Daffodils'), in Antonia Till, ed., *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p.187, available at www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud, accessed 5 September 2023.

9. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (London: Penguin Random House, 2015).

10. This elegy to the 'hero' of the Haitian Revolution was first published in 1803 and it was one of the very few acknowledgements in print of the mere existence of such an event – let alone its positive reception – which was deliberately denied its concrete historical significance for much time after its occurrence by Western academics and scholars, see Haram Lee, '"To Toussaint L'Ouverture" as an Elegy', Rethinking the Age of Revolution Brandeis University blog, available at blogs.brandeis.edu/revolutions/2014/04/14/to-toussaint-louverture-as-an-elegy/, accessed 5 September 2023. In 1807 Friedrich Hegel would publish Phenomenology of Spirit, which, in the section on 'Self-Consciousness', contained the famous 'Master/Slave' dialectic. There is no mention whatsoever of the Haitian Revolution, the constitution of 1804 and the proclamation of the first ever 'Black Republic'. On this and many others deliberate acts of denial and obliteration from history of Western public intellectuals and thinkers, see Susan F. Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

11. Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures, 'Reciprocity gestures', available at decolonialfutures.net, accessed 5 September 2023.

12. Wordsworth, *op. cit.* (note 8).

13. Ocean Vuong, *On Earth we're briefly gorgeous: A novel* (Penguin Books: New York, 2021).

14. Jane Frances Dunlop, 'Nervous? We Should Be', *Real Life* (19 July 2016), available at reallifemag.com/nervous-we-should-be/, accessed 5 September 2023.

15. James Grissom, *Follies of God: Tennessee Williams and the Women of the Fog* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016).

16. Gregory Sholette, 'Histories that disturb the present' (2020), available at youtu.be/3SjeAzICGYY, accessed 5 September 2023.

17. See Jessie Brennan, *A Fall of Ordinariness and Light* (2014), available at www.jessiebrennan.co.uk/a-fall-of-ordinariness-and-light, accessed 5 September 2023.

18. Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures, *op. cit.* (note 11).

19. Vanessa Andreotti, quoted from Dougald Hine, 'The Vital Compass: A Conversation With Vanessa Andreotti', *Dark Mountain* Issue 16: Refuge (2019), available at dougald.nu/the-vital-compass-a-conversation-with-vanessa-andreotti/, accessed 5 September 2023.

20. Carlos Garrido Castellano, *Art Activism for A Decolonial Future* (New York: SUNY Press, 2021), p.65, available at soar.suny.edu/handle/20.500.12648/7166, accessed 5 September 2023.

21. Vázquez, *op. cit.* (note 2).

22. Extract from written notes recorded after a conversation between Drawing Room and Jessie Brennan, revealing the significance of Jessie's presence and role in the process, to be understood as an active 'agent of change' rather than just an 'exhibiting artist'.

23. Alberto Duman, 'Beauty and the Beast: capital forces and cultural production', *The Architectural Review* (2 April 2014), available at www.architectural-review.com/essays/beauty-and-the-beast-capital-forces-and-cultural-production, accessed 5 September 2023.

24. Drawing Room, 'UNBUILD: A Site of Possibility', available at drawingroom.org.uk/exhibition/unbuild-a-site-of-possibility/, accessed 5 September 2023.

25. Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p.7.

26. Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), p.1. This was already made academic knowledge by the eminent Trinidadian scholar Eric Williams in his masterful *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), then given a further push in Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery* (1997). Continuing in this illustrious tradition of radical Black scholars in the Anglophone world, Kehinde Nkosi Andrews is Professor of Black Studies in the School of Social Sciences at Birmingham City University. His most well-known publications are *Back to Black, Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century* (2018), *The New Age of Empire: How Racism and Colonialism Still Rule the World* (2021) and *The Psychosis of Whiteness: Surviving the Insanity of a Racist World* (2023).

27. Vázquez, *op. cit.* (note 2).

28. A colour documentary by the London Metropolitan Archives explores issues associated with the development of London's Docklands and the involvement of the Greater London Council (GLC) in providing a voice for the local community. It includes interviews with individuals from the 'People's Plan Centre', which was established by the GLC, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=yV8GRdWgntU&ab_channel=LondonMetropolitanArchives, accessed 5 September 2023.

29. See Alberto Duman, 'Music for Masterplanning: The Complete Soundtracks', available at https://vimeo.com/417195496, accessed 6 September 2023.

30. See Culture and Creative Industries Unit, 'Securing Cultural Infrastructure and Workspace planning practice note', available at www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/arts-and-culture/culture-and-good-growth/cultural-infrastructure-plan-and-toolbox/securing-cultural-infrastructure-and-workspace-planning-practice-note - planning-conditions-158540-title, accessed 6 September 2023.

31. See Linda Martin Alcoff, 'Whiteness and Race Temperament', in *On Whiteness: The Racial Imaginary Institute* (London: SPBH Editions, 2022), pp.83–99.

Installation view of *UNBUILD: a site of possibility* at Drawing Room, London, 2023. (Photograph Benjamin Deakin).

The home within the house: ‘Fossa’ by Emily Speed

Matthew Turner

The dining table

The dining table in my parents’ house has always been in the same place. Indentations in the floor made over many years receive its legs and there are scuff marks at the bases of the six chairs around it. This is where we come together, whether eating, drinking tea or just talking. Once, the table was sent away to be repaired but still we sat around the space it would have taken up, on whatever we could find – a box of unread *National Geographic* magazines, a nightstand, a rolled-up piece of moth-eaten carpet – clinging to the rituals and edges of our world. It’s the centre of some implicit domestic solar system. Whatever happens throughout the day, everyone always ends up back at the table, roughly in the same shape – although imperceptibly altered – as they were the day before.

In the middle of Drawing Room’s gallery are what appear to be two low tables, signalling the dining room, the heart of the home perhaps – albeit one that’s hinted towards, but not present. They aren’t like any table we’ve seen before; it’s hard to imagine the kind of interior these would suit. Besides, this is not just a pair of tables. It’s also a distorted body: fingers are woven into walls, legs are made from materials that suggest flesh at varying degrees of health. If one characterises the forms that make up Emily Speed’s *Fossa* (2023) within the typologies of horror, it would be defined by an uncanny merging of table and body, both failing at how they are supposed to look and function, held in utero – a kind of monster or ogre in whom multiple creatures are biologically superimposed.

In the introduction to her book *A Darker Shade of Noir: New Stories of Body Horror by Women Writers* (2023), Joyce Carol Oates discusses how body horror began with 'female' characters such as Medusa, Scylla and Charybdis, who, in their 'perversion of "femininity"', were an affront to the male gaze and cast as uncontrollable by men.[1] If we consider the inequalities of patriarchal households and the male expectation for women to keep them in order, then the home that *Fossa* refers to could be understood as a corollary of the horror body. After all, a home – in the same way that Oates describes the female body 'as by nature vulnerable to forcible invasion' – is more susceptible to violation than any public place.[2] Oates continues to frame Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as a book about the female fear of freakish birth. Perhaps, then, Speed's creation of a dysfunctional, unstable and freakish home is the spatial equivalent of such a fear: of birthing a body with oversized and ill-matching parts taken from a graveyard. The artist's 'home' is misshapen and doesn't fit with conventional conceptions of happy family life.

The home that *Fossa* alludes to is dirty, messy and cluttered with illegible signs and marks, subverting, perhaps, a male fear of returning back from a hard day's work to a home, and by extension a mind, in disarray. It sits in opposition to the idea of controlling a partner through the demand of order in the home. The exploration of these ideas in sculptural form suggests objectification, positioning the body parts as a human attempting to claw back some life. As a result of merging the animate with inanimate, the flattened biomorphic shapes in *Fossa* are the opposite of

the rectilinear geometries we might usually expect to find in the home. Instead, they capture something of the more organic shapes of the mind. They convey the transformation of those who sit around the family table, their frustrations and worries, into one unsettling and fitful creature, which someone or something is attempting to hold together with distorted hands.

Although homes are static, all the objects and wallpaper patterns inside them also have a direct link to memories, be they happy or sad, all the while recording more recent tensions and occurrences. It's in this way, through some kind of symbiotic or even parasitic relationship with us, that the home becomes a living and breathing thing, acting as a surrogate memory or even a surrogate self. The interior of the home may not only reflect the interior of the mind, it may also be a mind and body in and of itself.

Fossa is concerned with seeing both these lives of the places in which we live. In the home everything has a double effect: what it is and the associations it carries in the mind. In *Fossa* we witness at once a typical article associated with dwelling and the emotional dimensions and geometries simmering within the minds and taught muscles of those who live there. Due to the changing nature of these feelings, the configuration is held in a state of instability. The two parts of the table – remnants of a broken home – are supported by legs of different kinds: the type we would normally associate with furniture, as well as a model of a human leg, an ineffectual structure made from a sickly green plaster.

The wooden leg

I must have been around seven when the letter fell quietly to the floor and I took it to my parents, who were, at that moment, eating breakfast. My father read it first and showed it to my mother, then they both laughed and he threw it in the bin. A few weeks later a similar letter appeared on the kitchen table and my sisters read it eagerly, holding it aloft so I couldn't see. Around this time, my younger sister's night terrors returned and she began her nocturnal sprints across the landing and down the stairs, claiming that she was being chased by a murderer. During the same period my older sister sat a school exam during a thunderstorm; she jumped suddenly at the noise, accidentally stabbing herself with a Parker fountain pen. She told me that she had blood poisoning and pointed out the inky lines spreading up her arm like veins.

A few more weeks passed and another letter arrived. My parents had been arguing a lot, and my mother passed it to my father and said 'They are trying to get in touch with your secret girlfriend again.' A few days later, I was climbing a tree in the garden and fell down, breaking my arm in two places. The cast was blue and it went all the way up my arm; my father cut down the tree early one morning while everyone slept. The letters kept coming and my father, not knowing what else to do, stuffed them under the sofa. We started going for walks around the old quarry. It was full of burnt-out cars; rusting trolleys emerged from a man-made lake; and rags of blue tarpaulin hung between the trees. He was worried about being made redundant and one day he asked me, at six-years-old, what we would do. I can't remember whether I eventually read the letters or someone explained the matter to me, but one of them – I imagine the last – said something to the effect of: 'Dear Mrs Brindley, This is our sixth letter in as many weeks. Your wooden leg is now ready to collect.'

Shortly before I went to university in 2011, my father was busy renovating the house, perhaps signalling a new chapter for him and my mother. One day, as he was pulling the boiler out to replace it, a wooden leg with a dusty, maroon pompom slipper on its foot fell out from behind a large pipe. He showed it to me, working the joints as though it were alive, and joking that she must have been keeping it warm, ready to put on. The next moment he said that her son, who my parents had bought the house from, had told them that his mother died in the bath.

Fossa is a composition of many conjoined parts but – for me at least – it centres around a leg. Although it isn't the exact same leg as the one I remember from my childhood home, it still has the same sense of precarity, upheaval, a subtle fear even, for something that's usually the symbol of balanced footing and stability in the world. Unlike table and chair legs, the leg at the notional centre of *Fossa* is not holding anything up, it's prone, it has given up. A large wooden pin protrudes from where a joint should be, unable to provide any balance for the tabletop it supposedly supports. Still, fabric fingertips, stretched and woven together to form a wall, clutch weakly at it, willing the arrangement to stay together.

Emily Speed, detail of *Fossa*, 2023, plywood, plaster, sand, goat hair, pearl glue, natural pigments, fired stoneware, fir branch, dowel, linen, cotton, wadding, magnets, crayon on paper and wire. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Benjamin Deakin).

Elsewhere, stability is possible, but never quite comes to fruition. Continuing the leg motif at a greater scale, the larger of the tables has a ball shape protruding from its edge, while the smaller takes on the form of a socket. These two pieces have the potential to connect and complete each other, but never quite get there. Moving around *Fossa*, the pieces look as though they might slot together, but it's impossible. Instead, they are constantly held in a state of detachment. The strong lighting in the gallery space projects shadows of these shapes onto the floor, multiplying the chances of connection and yet serving only to heighten a multiform failing.

The cupboard under the stairs

To find a wooden leg hiding away in an unseen and unfamiliar recess of a home, which up until that point we thought we knew well, is a reminder that we share our spaces with more than just objects, family members, pets and friends. They are containers for everything that's happened in them and perhaps it's disturbing to find such intimate traces of the people who came before us. Maybe finding such leftovers means they are still living there in a way; the home is a palimpsest of many people's lives and minds, as well as our own. Is someone else in the room? Probably, but not in the way that ghost stories teach us. The title of *Fossa* is taken from anatomy and refers to a shallow depression in a bone surface, where another articulating bone may be received or act to support structures. The piece, then, is a receiver or container: it brings things together, just as the home can be seen as a vessel that collects the lives and emotions that have lived within it.

In the house where I grew up, I've never seen the cupboard under the stairs empty or organised. When everyone moves on and it inevitably needs to be cleared out, I imagine it will be sad and shocking to see the walls of the strange enclosure bare and painted white, without the undulations of clothes and trinkets. I'll probably feel a sense of loss, because the chance to understand it has passed. I can easily recall the ambiguous status of the objects kept there: held tentatively between opposing threats of being taken to the charity shop or put in the bin, or placed on the staircase for further consideration. Some things, an odd shoe for example, held too much emotional value to be thrown away and, of course, a charity shop would have no use for a single shoe. It went back into the cupboard. Other things, my mother would put in the bin only for my father to retrieve them again.

Being much younger than everyone else, I didn't really understand the discussions about the things under the stairs. I was more interested in climbing through the contents of the cupboard – a world that smelled of old books, rotting leather and paint cans that had tipped over and were oozing banned chemicals. I looked for the things rumoured to be in there: a stuffed cat, a model car that fires matchsticks and my dad's old briefcase. I wasn't aware that I was undertaking a strange safari through items relating to unresolved and unresolvable disputes – arguments that were, in fact, about things that my family couldn't put into words, rather than tangible objects. Sometimes I would crawl too deep and something would shift in the great, dark pile. I would panic for a moment,

thinking I was going to be stuck forever, trapped among this pile of stuff, the true weight and gravity of which I didn't fully understand.

Models and miniatures stand in for the real thing and even though I didn't think about it then as I do now, the cupboard is like a small model of our home's dynamics as a whole. It's a microcosm of the larger reality it contains, while also generating another reality by reminding us of the feelings people had for one another – a recording of arguments that will be returned to again and again. I like to imagine that in the future there will be specialist archaeologists, who will sift through our cupboard and get a sense of how we treated each other and what we wanted to say but couldn't articulate beyond the negotiation of objects.

Seen as a model to understand a much larger organism, *Fossa* functions in much the same way as the cupboard under the stairs. It's a portrait of an emotional space that we have to imagine – a ghost realm that's only fleetingly perceptible through how it touches and marks the furnishings that make up the sculpture and its various parts. Each of the tables hosts a miniature of this house or home that we can't see. On the lower table, the walls are modelled in interlaced, knotted and grotesquely elongated fingers; on the larger table, there are geometric shapes drawn in crayon, similar to dance notation, which seem to record how someone might move around the space depicted on the other table. They are only partial and confused representations of a greater whole, seemingly the work of someone trying to make sense of a situation they no longer understand, and – despite the presence of hands – someone who no longer has a clear hold on their environment. Although the exact nature of the place alluded to in *Fossa* is ambiguous, it suggests that even though structure may keep the house standing, it's the work of people and their bodily sacrifices that make the house a functioning home.

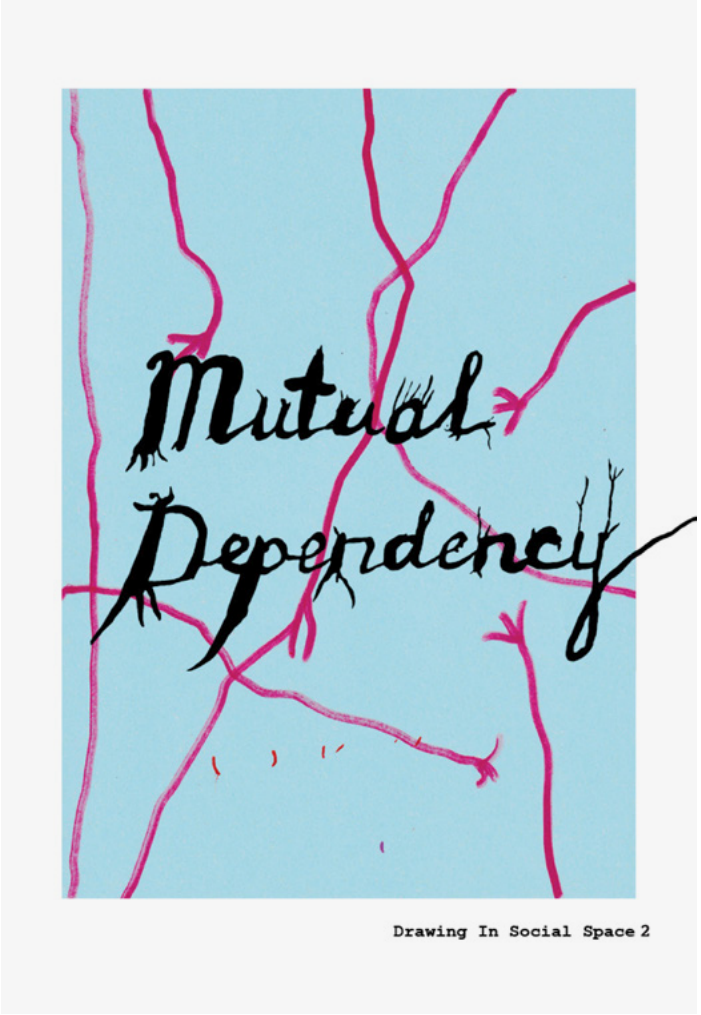
In *Fossa*, Speed has managed to excavate and manifest a sense of what home is like, and it's not peaceful, tidy, clean or ordered. It definitely doesn't feature warming your feet next to an open fire and it doesn't have a freshly painted white picket fence around it. Home, as delineated by *Fossa*, has the geometry and aching joints of someone who anxiously tries to keep things hidden, under the surface of what we see, while keeping it all together. If that home is anything like the one I grew up in, that 'someone' will be a mother, who is always caring for and maintaining the jointed, double-jointed and disjointed parts of the family life, holding and fitting them together with metaphorical and literal hands into something that might look like happiness.

1. Joyce Carol Oates, 'Introduction', in *idem, A Darker Shade of Noir: New Stories of Body Horror by Women Writers* (New York 2023), available at crimereads.com/joyce-carol-oates-women-body-horror/, accessed 29 October 2023.

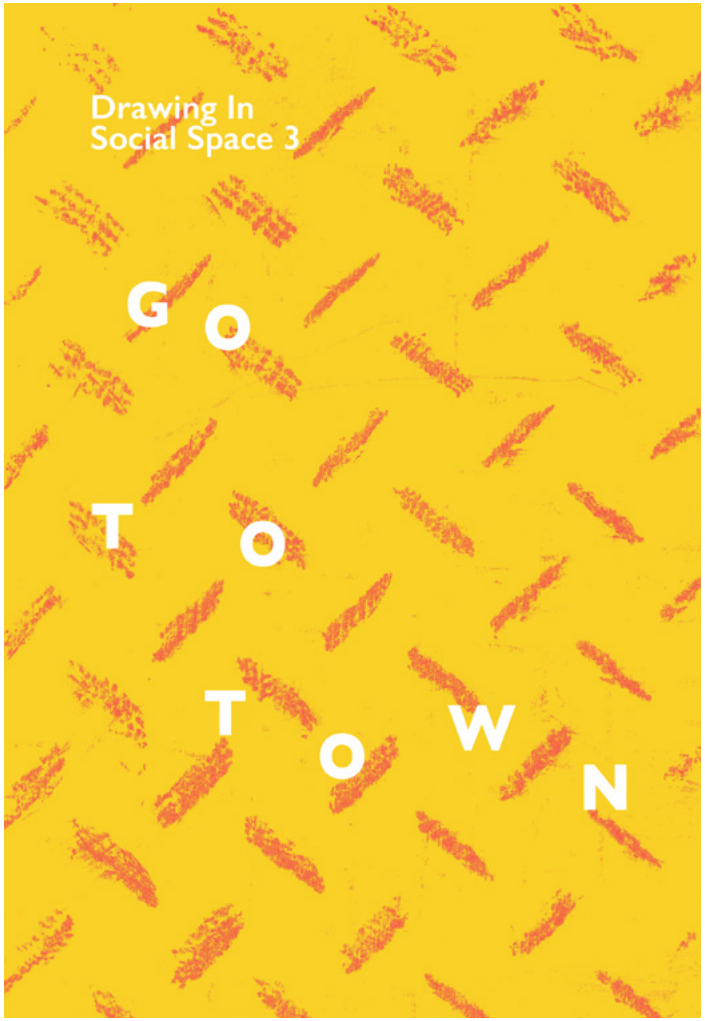
2. *Ibid.*

Appendix

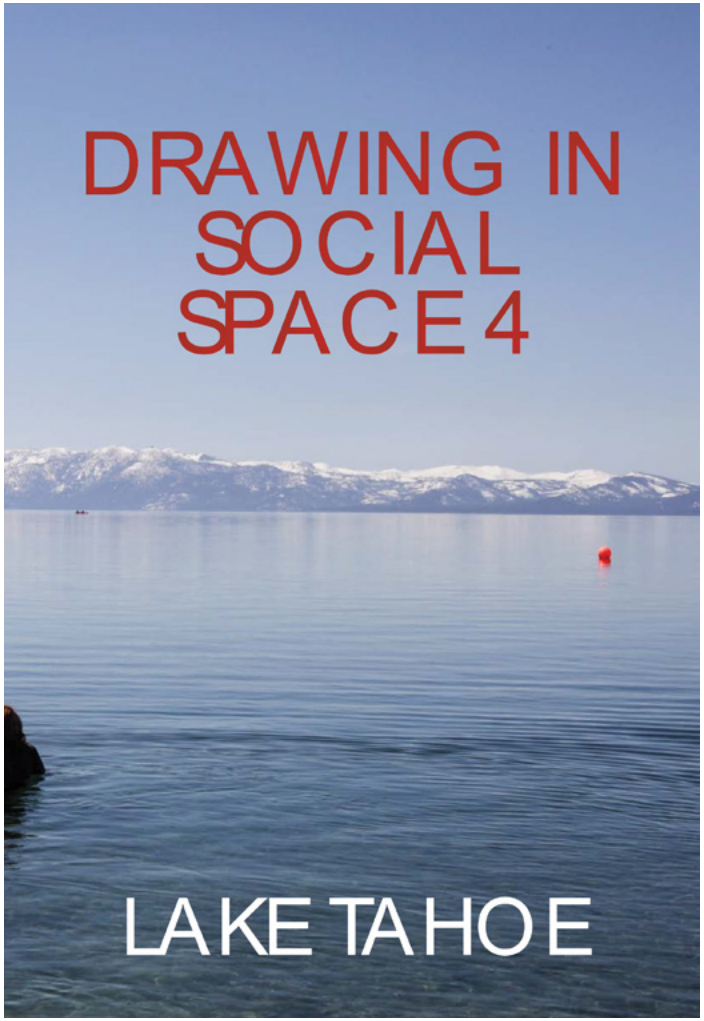
Drawing in Social Space
Project 1: Mujeres Creando, zine



Drawing in Social Space
Project 2: Gluklya (Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya), zine



Drawing in Social Space
Project 3: Al Hassan Issah, zine



Drawing in Social Space
Project 4: AZ OOR (Noureddine Ezarraf), zine

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Drawing in Social Space

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Project 4: artist AZ OOR (Noureddine Ezarraf); University of Nevada, Reno: Kate Berry (Professor of Geography), Adam Csank (Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Geography), Monica Maccaux (Associate Professor Graphic Design), Rick Parsons (Director of the Holman Arts and Media Center, UNR Lake Tahoe), Paul White (Associate Professor of Geography); UNR students: Mikayla Dimulias, Alejandra Griswold, Cryssa Jaggers, Bobby Lee, Betta Manalo, Hannah Potts, Jacob Rosenbaum, Hannah Saitz, Kylee Santos, Holly Strasser; and UNR Black Rock Press and students: Jasmine Munoz, Anna Newman, Edgar Padilla.

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UNBUILD: a site of possibility

A very special thank you to the artists who accepted our invitation to contribute artworks for Drawing Room's inaugural exhibition. In particular, we thank the artists who made new work in response to the physical and political conditions of our new space. Jessie Brennan has been an important critical friend to Drawing Room over the past year or more and it has also been a pleasure to support Ian Kiaer and Emily Speed in the conception and realisation of their new commissions. We are honoured to give audiences a chance to see Tanoa Sasraku's first 'Terratype' and thank Do Ho Suh for curating and sharing an important new body of drawings.

Thanks also to those who assisted with the production and installation of the exhibition with dedication and attention to detail including Exhibitions Manager Emma Morley and technicians Fergal Nesbitt, Billie Stanley and Ben Waggett. We are grateful to the authors of the insightful and thoughtful essays: Kelly Chorpening, in close dialogue with Renee Odjidja and Misty Ingham; Alberto Duman; and Matthew Turner.

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Cover: Installation view of *UNBUILD: a site of possibility* at Drawing Room, London, 2023. (Photograph Benjamin Deakin).

Inside covers: Jessie Brennan, detail of *To Agitate, Still*, 2023, handmade paper, daffodil, cotton and sisal, made in collaboration with Mandy Brannan, with thanks to the residents of the Setchell Estate. (Photograph: Benjamin Deakin).

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